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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ACCREDITED AMCHAM KICKS OFF ACTIVITIES

1. The newly accredited American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) in Bahrain held its inaugural event April 6, generating positive press play on the institution itself and on the impending Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the U.S. Over 50 business people attended the first meeting. The Ambassador delivered official remarks, as did Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry Second Vice Chairman Easm Fakhro, and Ministry of Commerce and Industry Assistant Undersecretary Ali Rahdi. The focus of the remarks was on the FTA and the positive role it will play for Bahrain and U.S. business.

2. Bahraini and regional media coverage of the first AmCham in the Gulf highlighted the important role that the AmCham will play in revitalizing Bahrain's economy. CNBC Arabia and the Bahrain Satellite Channel repeatedly aired remarks by the Ambassador and the AmCham Board during their regular news broadcasts and business programs during the Gulf's Thursday/Friday weekend when many families watch television together. Bahraini and regional newspapers filled their business sections with banner headlines and photos of the AmCham Board, and included detailed information about the Chamber's proposed programs. The Ambassador's remarks emphasized that the AmCham will assist with developing an even closer working relationship between American and Bahraini businesses and act as a catalyst for the FTA. The Ambassador went live on Bahrain Radio during the morning rush hour on April 6 to announce to commuters that the AmCham had been established. He also responded to questions about the benefits of having an AmCham in the country and gave an update on ratification of the FTA.

3. Bahraini public opinion leaders are upbeat about the establishment of the AmCham. Al Wasat newspaper, which carefully tracks the hot button issue of unemployment in Bahrain, carried a column on April 10 which heralded the AmCham with further strengthening the commercial bilateral relationship between Bahrain and the U.S. The Head of Economic Research at the University of Bahrain and a regular columnist on Bahraini business pages credits the AmCham with playing a future role in reducing unemployment in Bahrain and introducing Bahraini businesses to the U.S. market.

4. The AmCham currently has 20 members and hopes to have 40 by the end of the year. It plans to hold monthly breakfast and lunch meetings to engage the local business community. AmCham representatives announced their intention to conduct trade missions to the U.S., assist companies, take advantage of bilateral trade and investment opportunities, and arrange annual gala events.

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